

Migrants

'Embrace new reality'

Finland urges 'EU' funding conditions

HELSINKI, May 11, (Agencies): The European Union should attach more conditions to development funds earmarked for some member states in its next budget framework, Finland's finance minister said on Thursday, saying they should do more to share the cost of taking in migrants.



Orpo

Orpo told Reuters.

"But when we look forward, and at the migrant crisis, we just cannot stand by when payments from the net contributors are welcomed, but burden sharing is not."

The formerly communist eastern states' unwillingness to accept migrants has been criticised by richer western EU countries that have taken in most of the arrivals.

Hungary and Slovakia this week challenged the quota system in the EU's Court of Justice, and Poland backed the claim.

Finland's centre-right government, after discussing its targets for the EU's budget framework from 2021 onwards, said last week in a statement that it was "essential that EU funding be further conditioned in the future."

More than 1 million migrants and refugees entered the EU in 2015, many fleeing war and poverty in the Middle East and Africa. Some 32,000 went to Finland. The government responded by tightening immigration policies along with other Nordic states.

Orpo said the issue had been discussed between other net contributors and states that take in the majority of migrants.

"If we want the EU and its financing to be fair, then we need to be able to discuss this ... Our goal is that everyone should be jointly responsible (for the migration crisis)."

The EU has trimmed spending on funds destined for the least developed regions of the bloc in part due to the growing migration costs, raising fears in Eastern European member states of larger cuts in future.

The EU proposed in 2015 redistributing just 120,000 of the 1.6 million migrants and refugees entering the bloc under the quotas, which are based on a country's population and wealth.

Libya intercepts almost 500: Libya's coastguard on Wednesday intercepted a wooden boat packed with almost 500 migrants after duelling with a German rescue ship and coming under fire from traffickers, the navy said.

The migrants, who were bound for Italy, were picked up off the western city of Sabratha, said navy spokesman Ayoub Qassem.

The German non-governmental organisation "Sea-Watch tried to disrupt the coastguard operation ... inside Libyan waters and wanted to take the migrants, on the pretext that Libya wasn't safe," Qassem told AFP.

Sea-Watch posted a video on Twitter of what it said was a Libyan coastguard vessel narrowly cutting across the bow of its ship.

Qassem also said the coastguard had come under fire from people traffickers, without reporting any casualties.

The 493 migrants included 277 from Morocco and many from Bangladesh, said Qassem, and 20 women and a child were aboard the boat. All were taken to a naval base in Tripoli.

There were also migrants from Syria, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan, Chad, Mali and Nigeria, he added.

According to international organisations, between 800,000 and one million people, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, are currently in Libya hoping to make the perilous Mediterranean crossing to Europe.

Between 7,000 and 8,000 migrants are being held in Libyan detention centres after entering the country illegally, an immigration official said on Tuesday.

Cities urged to 'embrace new reality': The world's cities must prepare better for mass migration if they are to cope with a leap in inflows of people uprooted by conflict and, increasingly, the effects of climate change, said an international city network.

Cities need to lessen the shock to "fragile urban eco-systems" by using their limited resources flexibly to improve how they accommodate, integrate and provide work for migrants, said a new report from the 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) initiative backed by The Rockefeller Foundation.

The total number of international migrants stood at nearly 244 million in 2015, according to the report, including a record 65.3 million people forced from their homes by conflict and persecution worldwide. It noted estimates that a further 200 million could be displaced by climate change by 2050.

The vast majority of the world's migrants have settled in cities, with over 90 percent of immigrants in the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia based in urban areas, where they can more easily blend in and draw on support from migrant networks, said the report.

Cities will face problems relating to health, security, water scarcity, community cohesion and disaster risk if they do not take steps to address rising population density, according to the report, which stressed that cities should aim to take full advantage of the socio-economic benefits migration offers.

"The mass migration we are witnessing today is not a temporary state of emergency, but the beginning of a new reality," said the report. "Rather than resist this new reality, cities must embrace it."

Given the unpredictable nature of migrant flows — whether triggered by conflict, natural disasters or economic crises — cities need to be ready to accommodate waves of new arrivals, said the report, which analysed the impact of migration on cities including Athens, Medellin, Amman, Los Angeles and Paris.



(Row 4, left to right): Princess Tatiana of Greece, Prince Nikolaos, Princess Mabel, Prince Constantijn, Prince Carl Philip, Crown Princess Marie Chanta, Crown Prince Pavlos, Hereditary Grand Duke Guillaume of Luxembourg, hereditary Grand Duchess Stéphanie, Sophie, Countess of Wessex, Desirée Kogevinas and Carlos Euguster. (Row 3, left to right): Lady Elizabeth Shakerly, Queen Anne Marie, Princess Beatrix, Prince Daniel, Crown Princess Victoria, Crown Princess Mette-Marit, Crown Prince Haakon, Princess Martha Louise, Crown Prince Frederik, Crown Princess Mary, Madeleine Bernadotte Kogevinas, Bernhard Mach, and Jenni Haukio. (Row 2, left to right): Princess Astrid of Norway, Queen Maxima, King Willem Alexander, Prince Albert, Queen Silvia, King Carl Gustaf, Queen Sonja, King Harald, Queen Margrethe, Grand Duke of Luxembourg Henri, Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg, King Philippe, Queen Mathilde, President of Finland Sauli Niinisto, President of Iceland Gudni Johannesson, (Row 1, left to right): Emma Tallulah Behn, Leah Isadora Behn, Maud Angelica Behn, Princess Ingrid Alexandra, Prince Sverre Magnus pose for a group picture at the Royal Palace in Oslo, Norway on May 9, to mark the 80th Birthday of the King and Queen. (AFP)

Ukraine

Threats represent new form of info warfare

Text messages reveal high-tech front

KIEV, Ukraine, May 11, (AP): Television journalist Julia Kirienko was sheltering with Ukrainian soldiers and medics 2 miles (3 kms) from the front when their cellphones began buzzing over the noise of the shelling. Everyone got the same text message at the same time.

"Ukrainian soldiers," it warned, "they'll find your bodies when the snow melts."

Text messages like the one Kirienko received have been sent periodically to Ukrainian forces fighting pro-Russian separatists in the eastern part of the country. The threats and disinformation represent a new form of information warfare, the 21st-century equivalent of dropping leaflets on the battlefield.

"This is pinpoint propaganda," said Nancy Snow, a professor of public diplomacy at the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies.

The Associated Press has found that the messages are almost certainly being sent through cell site simulators, surveillance tools long used by US law enforcement to track suspects' cellphones. Photos, video, leaked documents and other clues gathered by Ukrainian journalists suggest the equipment may have been supplied by the Kremlin.

The texts have been arriving since 2014, shortly after the fighting erupted. The AP documented nearly four dozen of them, including the one that Kirienko received on Jan 31 in Avdiivka, a battle-scarred town outside the principal rebel-held city of Donetsk.

Soldiers

The messages typically say things such as "Leave and you will live" or "Nobody needs your kids to become orphans." Many are disguised to look as if they are coming from fellow soldiers.

In 2015, Ukrainian soldiers defending the railroad town of Debaltseve were sent texts appearing to come from comrades claiming their unit's commander had deserted. Another set of messages warned that Ukrainian forces were being decimated. "We should run away," they said.

"They were mostly threatening and demoralizing, saying that our commanders had betrayed us and we were just cannon fodder," said Roman Chashurin, who served as a tank gunner in Debaltseve.

Ukrainian military and intelligence services had no comment on the phenomenon, but government and telecommunications officials are well aware of what's going on.

A 2014 investigation by a major Ukrainian cellphone company concluded that cell site simulators were to blame for the

rogue messages, according to an information security specialist who worked on the inquiry. He spoke on the condition that neither he nor his former firm be identified, citing a nondisclosure agreement.

Col Serhiy Demydiuk, the head of Ukraine's national cyberpolice unit, said in an interview that the country's intelligence services knew the devices were being used as well.

"Avdiivka showed that the Russian side was using fake towers," he said. "They are using them constantly."

Cell site simulators work by impersonating cellphone towers, allowing them to intercept or even fake data. Heath Hardman, a former US Marines signals analyst who operated the devices in Iraq and Afghanistan, said they were routinely used by American military intelligence officers to hunt insurgents.

Sending mass text messages in wartime isn't entirely new. The Islamic militant group Hamas sent threatening messages to random Israelis during the 2009 conflict over Gaza, for example, though it is not clear how that was done.

So what are cell site simulators and how do they work?

■ What are they?

Cell site simulators work by masquerading as one of the millions of cell towers that keep people connected all around the world. The devices, which can vary in size and are also known as IMSI catchers, or by various brand names such as DRT boxes or Stingrays, take advantage of well-known flaws in cellphone network security to trick nearby handsets into divulging information or behaving in ways that they shouldn't. They've been used to block phone use in British prisons, track gang members in Canada and allegedly eavesdrop on protesters in Chicago. Authorities have long fought to keep the hardware out of the public eye, but cell site simulators are increasingly becoming subject to judicial scrutiny and have even popped up in popular culture, appearing in shows such as the Baltimore crime series "The Wire."

■ How do they work?

Handsets try to keep their users as connected as possible, jumping from one cellphone tower to another in a constant struggle to improve reception. Because securing phones' signals from eavesdroppers has long taken a backseat to making sure calls get through clearly, it's relatively easy to create set up a malicious device that mimics a cell tower, drawing data from nearby phones like an invisible magnet. Although traditionally the domain of intelligence agencies and the military, cell site simulators are now so widespread that even local police forces, talented amateurs and criminals can quietly using the devices to steal secrets.



Illegal immigrants, who were rescued by the Libyan coastguard in the Mediterranean off the Libyan coast, arrive at a naval base in the capital Tripoli on May 10. (AFP)



Trump Putin

Europe

'Too early to speak': The Kremlin said Thursday it was too early to speak of a thaw in ties with Washington, a day after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met US President Donald Trump.

"It's too early to draw this conclusion," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

But he added: "Of course the fact that a dialogue is taking place is very positive."

Peskov said both Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin are expected to be at the G20 summit in Germany in July, which "could serve as a good occasion" for them to meet.

Wednesday's meeting came as Trump was embroiled in a political firestorm over the investigations into allegations his US presidential election campaign had colluded with Russia.

Lavrov met both Trump and US counterpart Rex Tillerson in Washington, saying the US president was seeking "mutually beneficial" and "pragmatic" relations with Moscow. (AFP)

3 suspects charged: Three suspects in last month's bombing in the Saint Petersburg metro have been charged for their involvement in a "terrorist act", Russian investigators said Thursday.

Russia's Investigative Committee said suspects Bakhran Ergashev, Ibragimzhon Ermatov and Makhmadyusuf Mirzaalimov had been charged with involvement in a "terrorist act" and for having illegally used explosives.

Seven other suspects in the April 3 attack, which killed 15 people, will be charged in the near future, the committee said.

The Imam Shamil Battalion, a group suspected of links to al-Qaeda, claimed responsibility for the bombing, US monitor SITE Intelligence Group said last month. (AFP)

Team to unveil candidates: Emmanuel Macron's start-up political party was to announce on Thursday the names of several hundred candidates to do battle in a French parliamentary election that will decide how much power the centrist president-elect will enjoy once in office.

announcement would probably fall a hundred or so short of the 577 names needed to fight every seat in France's National Assembly.

Jean-Paul Delevoye said this was partly due to a flood of offers and to tough decisions in sensitive areas about who should run in the name of a party created only a year ago — and which goes into battle for the first time in the June elections with long-established

parties of all political stripes. "We did not want to rush things in a few dozen constituencies, around one hundred, that are particularly sensitive," Delevoye told Reuters. He added that the remainder of places on the Republic on the Move's list would be filled in the days ahead.

Some 16,000 people had applied to become candidates, he said — 1,600 of them in the few

days since the 39-year-old ex-banker beat National Front leader Marine Le Pen in the presidential runoff on May 7.

To qualify, want-to-be candidates, including total newcomers to politics, filled extensive on-line applications with CVs and explanatory letters for pre-screening and follow-up interviews, according to local media interviews with some of them.

Bloc OKs 'visa-free' travel for Ukrainians

BRUSSELS, May 11, (AFP): The European Union approved visa-free travel for Ukrainians on Thursday, fulfilling a key promise to cement ties with Kiev as it remains embroiled in a deadly conflict with pro-Russian insurgents.

"YES, we did it!" Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko wrote on Facebook after the Brussels decision, which the former Soviet republic has been trying to clinch for years.

"It feels like coming home after a long and exhausting journey," the pro-Western leader said, adding that Ukraine was gradually "becoming part of a common European civilisation".

Catherine Fabre, a middle-aged business management lecturer at Bordeaux University, told BFM TV she was in the running and wanted to shake things up in a National Assembly which was, in her word, dominated by too many middle-aged white men. (RTSR)

Austria jails Syrian: A Syrian migrant has been jailed for life in Austria for executing 20 wounded government soldiers in his home country.

The court in the western city of Innsbruck announced its ruling late Wednesday after a jury found the 27-year-old guilty of 20 charges of "murder as a terror offence".

The man, who denied the charges, was detained in a refugee shelter in Tyrol state last June after being denounced by a fellow Syrian.

According to Austrian media, the accused had boasted to other asylum seekers of belonging to a rebel unit and shooting unarmed or injured troops loyal to Syrian President Bashar-al Assad.

After his arrest, the man initially admitted to the 2013-2014 killings in the western region of Homs but later retracted his confession, saying his testimony had been badly translated.

The translator rejected this in court: "The defendant told me he had shot badly wounded soldiers. I asked him to repeat his claim and he did."

The man, who was not named, was tried for war crimes under Austrian law. (AFP)



US Defense Secretary James Mattis (center left), talks with the Commander of the NATO eFP battalion battlegroup and the German contingent in Lithuania Lieutenant Colonel Christoph Huber (center right), as they meet with US troops deployed in Lithuania, with representatives of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, and with soldiers of the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battalion Battlegroup in Lithuania at the General Silvestras Zukauskas Training Area in Pabrade on May 10. Mattis holds talks with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė and defence ministers from the trio of Baltic NATO states where the alliance is deploying battle groups for the first time as tripwires against possible Russian adventurism. (AFP)